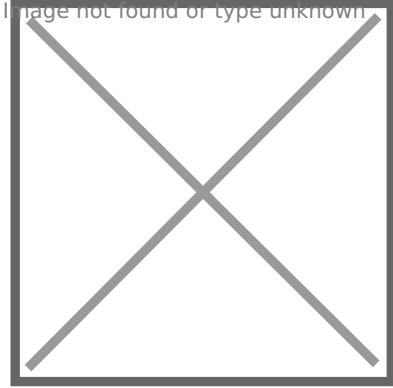


Was Epicurus Sexually Active?

Post by "Don" of February 27, 2023 at 12:58 PM

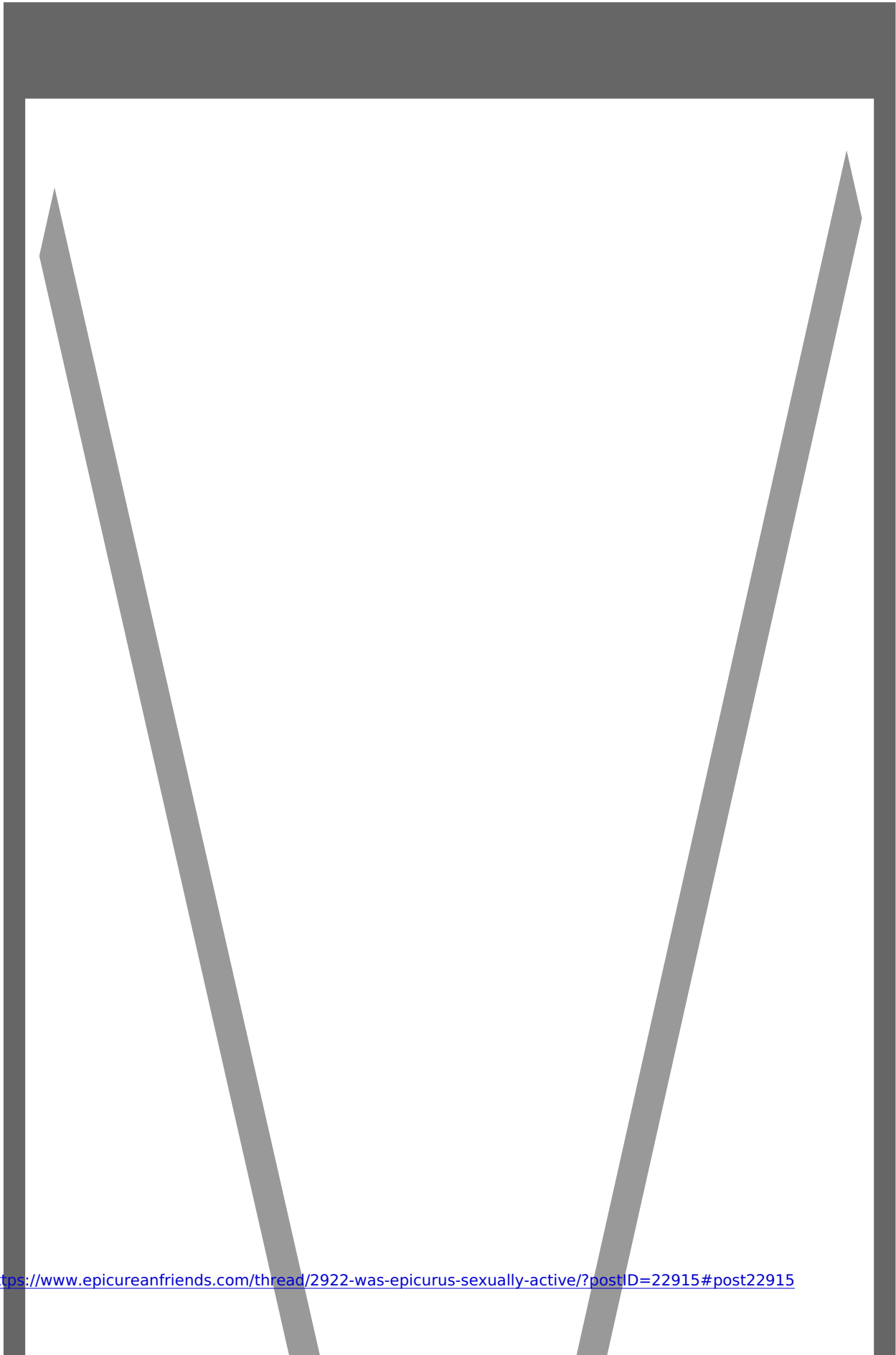


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[Remembering The Garden: The Trouble With Women In The School Of Epicurus](#)

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Abstract

Readers of Philodemus are well aware of the difficulties posed by the fragmentary state of the charred papyri. The premise of this paper is that similar but often unacknowledged obstacles confront us when we read almost any text about Epicureanism, even if the text happens to be relatively well preserved. The problem is that most of our sources— in addition to being late, fragmentary, and highly partisan—are already engaged in the process of reconstructing the first generation of the Garden. Hostile writers are eager to document what they portray as the immoral sensualism of Epicurus. Friendly sources take an apologetic stance against such polemics but may sometimes incorporate hostile material unwittingly. To illustrate the problem, this essay focuses upon the issue of Epicurean women. Ancient and modern authorities seem to agree that the Garden included many female members, but a second look reveals that the sources are not as reliable as has been assumed. In fact, most of what the ancient texts say about Epicurean women is bound up—sometimes inextricably—with the twenty-threehundred-year-old tradition of anti-Epicurean polemic and apologetic response. To generations of Greeks and Romans, the presence of women and slaves in the Garden was emblematic—for good or for ill—of the nature of Epicureanism.